

## **FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** May 14, 2015

**Agenda Item:** Lost Creek WMA Addition (R2)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to acquire 449 acres adjoining the Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County. The purchase price would be the appraised value of the fee-title property, which is yet to be determined. This project funding would likely be from the Natural Resource Damage Program matched with Habitat Montana funds. Mr. Wade Johnson is the current owner and willing seller, and has enrolled this property in Block Management (Antelope Gulch, #62) for many years. In 2014, 62 percent of 82 respondents observed game on the Antelope Gulch BMA, 14 percent harvested game, and 78 percent reported enjoying a satisfactory experience on the proposed acquisition.

The proposed Lost Creek Addition is critical elk winter range and supports mule deer, bighorn sheep and black bear. Antelope Creek runs ½ mile along the northern boundary of the property. Aspen and associated riparian vegetation offers habitat diversity for a variety of small mammals and birds including ruffed grouse, great gray owls, flammulated owls, and neotropical migrants. Upland habitats include xeric Douglas fir, native bunchgrass communities, and juniper shrub-grasslands. Acquisition would conserve FWP's investment in the Lost Creek WMA by precluding subdivision or other actions that might compromise the WMA. Perpetual public access to the parcel for hunting and other recreational activities would be assured.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

Upon Commission endorsement, FWP would develop a draft environmental assessment and management plan for public review and comment.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

No action would leave the property unprotected from the possibility of future development and habitat loss. FWP and Mr. Johnson have explored the possibility of a conservation easement in depth and have determined that fee-title purchase is the only feasible action alternative.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends that the commission endorse the proposal to begin a public involvement process and develop a plan and decision for acquiring the Lost Creek Addition. The property contributes important wildlife habitat and public hunting values to the existing Lost Creek WMA, and the possible future loss of private-land habitat and access would diminish the existing span and quality of habitat on public lands.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse FWP's proposal to develop a plan for adding about 449 acres of habitat to the Lost Creek Wildlife Management Area.